

March  
2000

LEVEL  
ONE

PROCESSED

FEB 25 2000

GTU LIBRARY

# LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY



WRESTLING IN FAITH

MARCH  
2000

VOLUME 13  
NUMBER 2

# LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

For growth in  
faith and mission

## Art and photos

PhotoDisc, Inc. 1,  
8-11, 16, 25, 37, 48;  
Old Testament:  
© American Bible  
Society, 1976, 2, 23;  
Courtesy Simon &  
Schuster, 14; Courtesy  
Kathryn Swanson, 18,  
20; Cleo Photography,  
21; Courtesy  
Augsburg Fortress,  
Publishers, 31-33;  
Courtesy Marge  
Leegard, 35; Sue-  
Edison Swift, 36;  
Linnea J. West Wong,  
39, 43; Image Club  
Graphics, 49

## On the cover

PhotoDisc, Inc. ©  
2000; designed by  
Jack Kenward and  
Linnea J. West Wong

## THEME ARTICLES Wrestling in Faith

### 2 Does God really wrestle?

**Terence E. Fretheim**  
*Have you "mixed it  
up" with God lately?*

### 5 The Psalms and wrestling

**Walter Brueggemann**  
*"Over here, God! Make  
things right! Now!"*

## DREAMS AND VISIONS

### 8 I never dreamed ...

**Herbert W. Chilstrom**  
*A powerful story of  
God communicating  
through dreams.*

### 13 A vision of healing

**Stephen P. Gerhard**  
*This excerpt from  
A Whole New Life  
by Reynolds Price  
is a glimpse into a  
modern-day vision.*

### 16 Ancient and biblical dreams

**Robert Karl Gnuse**  
*Dream reports in  
the Bible draw on  
ancient forms to show  
an experience of the  
divine.*

### 23 Climbing Jacob's Ladder

**Lorraine S. Brugh**  
*We climb, too, when  
we sing of Jacob's  
ladder.*

## IN GOD'S IMAGE

**Terence E. Fretheim**  
*A Bible study on the  
book of Genesis.*

### 25 Wrestling in Faith (Session 7)

*Lutheran Woman Today* (ISSN 0896-209X), a magazine for all women, is developed by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and published 10 times per year by Augsburg Fortress, Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440. *Lutheran Woman Today* editorial offices are at 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

Copyright © 2000 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Except for *IdeaNet*, duplication in whole or in part in any form is prohibited without written permission from the publisher. Printed in U.S.A. Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, Minn., and additional mailing offices. Annual subscriptions: group rate, \$9.50 (regular or big-print edition); individual, \$11.50 (regular or big-print edition); outside North America add \$6 for postage. Single copies, \$1.35 (regular or big-print edition). POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Lutheran Woman Today*, Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, Box 1816, Danbury, CT 06813-1816.

Audiotape edition for the visually impaired \$11.50. Payable in U.S. funds. Contact ELCA Braille and Tape Ministry, Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440.

\*

Lutheran Woman Today

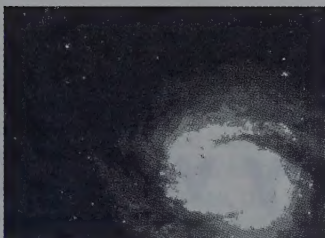


## Women of the ELCA IdeaNet

A helpful newsletter found in the middle of LWT.

Gather tips and tools for "Extending the Family"—how to increase participation and welcome new women into your women's organization.

**Editor**  
Nancy J. Stelling  
**Managing Editor**  
Lue Edison-Swift  
**Associate Editor**  
Deb Bogaert  
**Production Editor**  
James Satter  
**Graphic Designer**  
Lia J. West Wong  
**Secretary**  
Bettelou Bruce  
**Guest Planners**  
Faith Fretheim  
Lance E. Fretheim



## BIBLE STUDY

### 18 Twins talk to Rebekah

*Kathryn Swanson*  
*Rebekah tells it like it was.*

### 21 Women of Genesis Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah

*Beverly J. Stratton*  
*Fabulous and flawed: three oh-so-human women.*

## AND ...

### 31 Who, me? Ordained?

*Glennady Sculley*  
*Have you thought about becoming a pastor?*

### 35 Give us this day Best friends

*Marj Leegard*  
*Like Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah we are blessed with friendships.*

### 47 Underlines

*Barbara Hofmaier*  
*Ways to use the January/February and March issues of LWT.*

## LENT

### 36 Mothering seasons

#### Parental guilt

*Kirsi Stjerna*

*Parents, these words of confession and affirmation of grace are for you.*

### 44 Between you and me

#### Praying our way through AD2K

*Catherine I. H. Braasch*

*Your invitation to join a Lenten journey of prayer.*

### 48 Amen!

#### Devotional prayers for today

*Kathleen Kastilahn*

*Giving up, going away, taking on.*

## WOMEN OF THE ELCA

### 38 Giving back in bounty

*Valora Starr Butler,*  
*Jonathan Kalkwarf,*  
*Catherine Marquis*  
*Women of the ELCA's 1998 audit and 2000 budget information.*

## BULLETIN BOARD

### 49 How to contact LWT, Augsburg Fortress, and Women of the ELCA.

opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the writers and, except for the Women of the ELCA department and the Bible study, are not necessarily those of the Women of the ELCA. Unless otherwise cited, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible, copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

# Does God really wrestle?

Terence E. Fretheim

Have you ever wrestled with God? If so, how did your match go? Did you win? Did God win? Was it a draw?

What was your condition after the match was over? Was the wrestling good for you? Were you a better person for it? Or were you just left all tied up in knots?

Did you start the wrestling, or did God? If it was you, what were you wrestling about? If it was God, what reason might God have had to start wrestling with you, to decide that you needed to be “taken to the mat”?

How did your wrestling match go compared to Jacob’s engagement with God in Genesis 32:22-32?

Read the text and see. Perhaps you have so many questions about the story that it’s hard to compare. Considering the following issues may help.

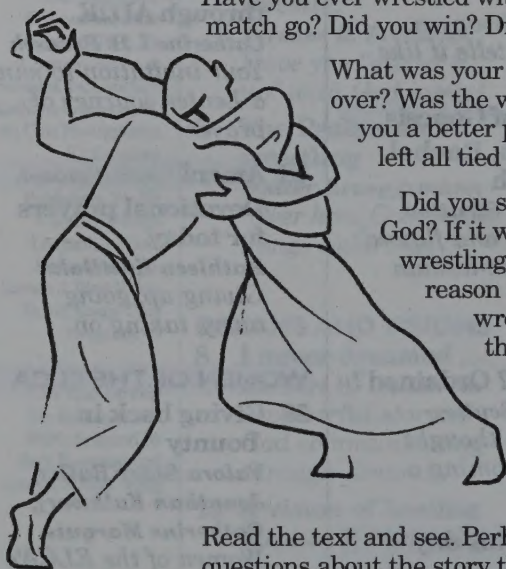
*A man came and wrestled with him.*  
(Genesis 32:24)

## 1. Who starts the match?

Verse 24 says that Jacob is alone, and then suddenly he isn’t. The “man” apparently starts it, yet we cannot be certain. That’s how it often is with unplanned conflicts.

## 2. Who is this “man”?

The text initially speaks of “a man” (verse 24). But later, both Jacob and his wrestling partner identify the man as God (verses 28 and 30). It may be hard for you to imagine that God would take the form of a man and actually wrestle with someone. But, of course, God could do that. Other Old Testament texts speak of God appearing in the form of a man in specific situations (see Genesis 18:1-8; Judges 13:6, 21-22). Christians, as they remember Jesus,





certainly understand that God could come to us in the form of a human being.

### **. Does this text describe an actual wrestling match between God and Jacob?**

Some people think that this story is only a vivid way of speaking of a spiritual struggle. Yet the text does not speak of this encounter as a dream or vision (unlike Genesis 28:12). Jacob is not sleeping. The text speaks of a physical struggle. If it were only a spiritual struggle, it would be hard to understand the blow to the body that put Jacob's hip out of joint and the limp that results (verses 25 and 31).

But, thankfully, God's wrestlings with us do take different forms. God encounters people in ways that best connect with who they are. (Evidently Jacob was a wrestler.) With you, it may be verbal wrestlings in the night, or your dreams, or heated exchanges with your best friend. But note that, like Jacob, you are not necessarily called to be passive or self-effacing in these encounters with God. Wrestle for all you're worth!

### **. Does God really wrestle with Jacob, or is God just playing**

### **games with him?**

Remember that this text does not speak of God in all God's power and glory; God stoops to encounter Jacob at his own level. Hence, the text does not suggest that God could have pinned Jacob with a flip of the wrist. Even when God strikes Jacob on the hip socket (verse 25), that does not decide the match. God even has to ask Jacob to let go, but Jacob refuses to do so until he is blessed (verse 26). He holds on to God tenaciously! And God commends Jacob for holding his own with God; in fact, God admits to having failed to prevail at one point (verse 25) and says finally that Jacob has "prevailed" (verse 28). Perhaps neither emerges as an unqualified winner.

Now, did God just let Jacob do well in this match? Apparently not. God commits to a genuine encounter with Jacob and engages him with the kind of power that does not overpower him. God, in assuming this form, chooses to have a power that is in some sense comparable to the power that Jacob brings to the moment. More generally, the will of God can be resisted, and often is (our sin, for example). God does retain the power to bless; Jacob

recognizes that he cannot bless himself, yet he can struggle with God for a blessing.

Think of your moments of wrestling with God as times of genuine engagement during which God truly mixes it up with you. You might, like Jacob, even come away with a divine commendation for your wrestling abilities! And, as with Jacob, God may come away with a new appreciation for you and for the resources you bring to the relationship.

### **5. For what purpose does God wrestle with Jacob?**

We are not told explicitly why God did this. Some think that this is an act of discipline on God's part. Yet God speaks no such word and, in fact, commends Jacob for his wrestling ability and gives him a new name to match (32:28). That Jacob is in conflict with his brother may provide one clue. God engages Jacob at a sharply vulnerable moment in his life. The very next morning, he must confront Esau physically. Surprisingly, Esau meets Jacob graciously; this prompts Jacob to say that seeing his face is "like seeing the face of God" (33:10).

Recall that Jacob did see God face to face during the

wrestling match (32:29-30). He had what was no doubt a difficult (and painful) wrestling match that lasted the whole night long, but in the end it was a good and gracious experience. He emerges in the light of day with a blessing, a new name, his life preserved, and new resources to meet Esau.

One might say that God puts Jacob through a struggle the night before in order to better prepare him for the encounter the next day. God gives him a gracious rehearsal of the difficulties he will have to face in the dawn's new light.

God may engage us in similarly dangerous or conflicted moments. God may go through such times of wrestling with us before we have to go through them with other persons or situations. This engagement can provide new resources for our life's journey. God's blessings along the way! **LAW**

*Terence E. Fretheim is a professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. He recently completed a nine-part video series on the book of Genesis. For information, call Seraphim Communications at 800-733-3413.*



TAKE DOWN!

# The Psalms and wrestling

Walter Brueggemann

There is no doubt that **praise** is the normal, appropriate, and sustained way that trusting people relate to the God of faith. Praise is an act rooted in gratitude and amazement, in which one gladly cedes, or gives over, one's life, goods, and future to the safe-keeping of God. It is for this reason that the Psalter (the book of Psalms), the earliest hymnal of faith, overflows with exuberant praise.

## LAMENT AND COMPLAINT, TOO

A sober look at the Psalter, however, makes clear that there is more to serious faith than simply glad praise. A counterpoint to such ready, confident surrender—voiced in a host of Psalms—is an accent on **lament** and **complaint**. In these psalms, Israel (or an Israelite person) engages God in a deep struggle for the future. A song of **lament** (for example, Psalm 13) gives full expression to sadness, grief, and suffering, and addresses such a needful condition directly to God. The psalm affirms that the speaker's condition is properly a concern for God.

## OVER HERE, GOD!

A statement of complaint (as in Psalm 44:9-26) operates on the same assumption, but with more abrasion and insistence. The **lament** and **complaint**—with the difference between them more of degree than of kind—present worshipers in God's presence who are so preoccupied with their need and pain that they are unwilling, or unable, to praise God. Their self-preoccupation is so acute that they are unwilling to cede their life over to God in gladness. Instead, they insist that God must focus energy and attention on them, for they now are the only important subject; for the moment, God must take second place.

*There  
is more  
to serious  
faith  
than  
simply  
glad  
praise.*

*These  
prayers  
are filled  
with the  
urgency  
of "Hear!  
Come!  
Save!"*

## RECRUITING GOD

Now such a stance of faith—and it is clearly faith and not unfaith—may sound rather odd, given our conventional assumptions and practices. It is usual church practice to assume that any trouble or need is our fault, and therefore the appropriate response is confession and penitence.

The remarkable feature of these prayers of Israel is that characteristically Israel does not accept blame for its needful status. The prayers assume, rather, that (a) God has been negligent and neglectful or (b) God's inattentiveness has created an opportunity for an enemy to do harm. Either way, the prayer is an insistence that things will not be right until God resumes faithful, active concern for Israel. The purpose of the prayer, often abrasively voiced, is to recruit God into saving activity that is, in any case, God's proper stance toward God's people.

## MAKE IT RIGHT!

A most remarkable feature of these psalms is that they are permeated with imperatives, or commands, that the faithful believer speaks to God. Imagine, that a human speaker should address

God in such urgent and insistent a tone! Thus these prayers are filled with the urgency of "Hear! Come! Save!"—all a bid for God's active solidarity in circumstance of need. This cry mushrooms from below, and is addressed to the God who is known to be all-powerful but momentarily not engaged on behalf of Israel.

The theme of wrestling revolves around the capacity of Israel to speak such an imperative to God. That tone, that attitude—found everywhere in these Psalms—is reflected in Jacob's insistence upon a blessing from God in Genesis 32:26. In effect, all these imperatives demand blessing from God, a gift of healing, restoration, and affirmation that will make a viable, livable, joyous future possible.

"Wrestling" in this case puts the need that God *should and must* bless on the mat. The one who says this need does not *cede* to God in praise but *claims* in desperation. Wrestling depends on the freedom, courage, and energy to engage God, not as a submissive beggar but as a legitimate partner with rights and grounds for making a demand. One cannot wrestle vigorously and seriously if one senses that one must be careful



not to push too hard or say too much. Such a softness, absent in these prayers, is like an adult wrestling with a child, taking care not to cause harm. In making its claim to God, Israel takes no such care with God and is not afraid to carry the demand directly into God's face, in a tone that compels God to respond!

## ASSUMING THE RIGHT TO WRESTLE

The ground for such an imperative is Israel's sense of *entitlement* over against God. Israel has legitimate ground for such stringent expectation from God. First, this entitlement is formally grounded in Israel's elementary assumption of covenant, in which Israel has sworn to be God's obedient people and God has sworn to be the faithful God of Israel (see Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Jeremiah 31:2). Israel's prayer is an insistence that God be faithfully the God of the covenant.

Second, underneath the formal agreement of covenant, this challenging and making demands of God is rooted in Israel's God-given sense of *dignity*. A promise of human well-being free of pain, deprivation, and anguish is the irreducible claim for human life that Israel, in

its faithful courage, will not compromise or surrender. That is, in its desperate need, Israel knows that God "owes" Israel well-being, and Israel will insist on what it is entitled to because of the very character of God. It is this conviction of human claim that separates the faith of the Bible from all religion that is excessively submissive. *Entitled* Israel will not submit when its life is at stake. Thus its *praise* is always in tension with its *claiming*.

## TELLING IT LIKE IT IS

It is a widespread practice in the church to deny, or at least tone down, such abrasive, entitled insistence in the interest of enhancing or glorifying God.

Unfortunately, such a denial has in fact become so widespread that believing people have learned the habits of praise, and they do the duty of praise when the true sensibility of their life is deeply otherwise. In its prayers of imperative and its bold wrestling, Israel refuses such denial. It insists that its utterance to God must be fully in tune with its real-life situation. It tells its truth to God, and invites God's response.

It is my belief that this long-held, widespread

*Truth-telling is the way back to praise!*

practice of denial in the church has encouraged a broad "false consciousness" in our society that turns into violence. Where the truth of pain cannot be told in the face of God, the anger builds and soon turns to real rage, vigorously expressed toward neighbor in violence, in military ambition, in economic greed, and in self-righteous moralism. Israel's wrestling offers a deep alternative to such denial, which has become all too much of a habit among us. Israel knows that truth-telling is the way back

to praise! Those who honestly claim themselves and their entitlements from God characteristically arrive, yet again, at the giving of praise. It is for that reason that these imperative prayers usually (but not always) culminate in grateful praise. **LWT**

*Walter Brueggemann, author and theologian, is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and teaches at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Ga.*



# I never dreamed ...

*Herbert W. Chilstrom*

I never dreamed ... that dreams could be so important.

For most of my life I assumed that dreams were of no consequence. Yes, I had vivid dreams now and then, but I paid no attention to them, even the ones that cried out for reflection.

My seminary training didn't help. I came through theological studies at the time when the so-called "critical" approach was in its heyday. Although I value most insights that came from that approach to the study of the Bible, it was not without its drawbacks. Among others, it taught me to be skeptical of the supernatural, to question the unusual, and to judge the miraculous. As a consequence, I believed that dreams and visions were for another age.



Then my youngest son, Andrew, died by his own tragic decision. In a moment, my life was turned upside down.

Just two nights after his death, I had a vivid dream. I saw his face. We were standing close. He had a look of peace and contentment. He was smiling. It lasted only for a moment. But when I awakened I had a strong sense that in spite of the shock of his death, somehow he was all right now. His turmoil was over. He was at peace. He was in a safe place.

I wondered if this dream was merely my own unconscious desire to convince myself that all was well with Andrew. Or, was this a gift from God, assuring me that Andrew now had the peace that eluded him in life?

Two weeks later came another vivid dream. There appeared a man I had never met but whose writings I enjoyed. I had no idea what he looked like. Yet it was this man and no one else. In the dream he seemed to have unusual sympathy for me. I pondered the dream for days. Finally, I decided to write to him. I told him exactly the thought on which I had dreamed about him.

I sealed the letter and set it at the back of my desk. For several days I looked at it and wrestled about whether to mail it. Finally I dropped the letter in the mail.

After two or three weeks came a nine-page reply. Among other things, I learned that the man had heard about my son's death on the same day that I dreamed about him. He said he had thought about me all of that day, wondering how a person in the public eye would deal with such a personal calamity. Then he proceeded to describe in detail what he thought my son must have been like. My mouth dropped open as I read. Even those who had known him well for all of his 18 years could not have been more accurate in describing Andrew's complex personality.



Again, I wondered if the dream was merely a cry from my unconscious mind. Was it nothing more than coincidence that this man I had never met had heard about Andrew's death on the very same day I dreamed about him? Is this part of what psychologist Carl Jung meant by "the collective unconscious" that links us together at times in ways we can't describe rationally?

Fast-forward several months. An emotionally unbalanced man had focused his attention on me and made threatening moves. It came to the point where we needed to hire a private security person for my office. The night before the security guard began his duty, I had a dream in which the troubled man was pursuing me. In the dream I felt frightened at first, but then reasoned that

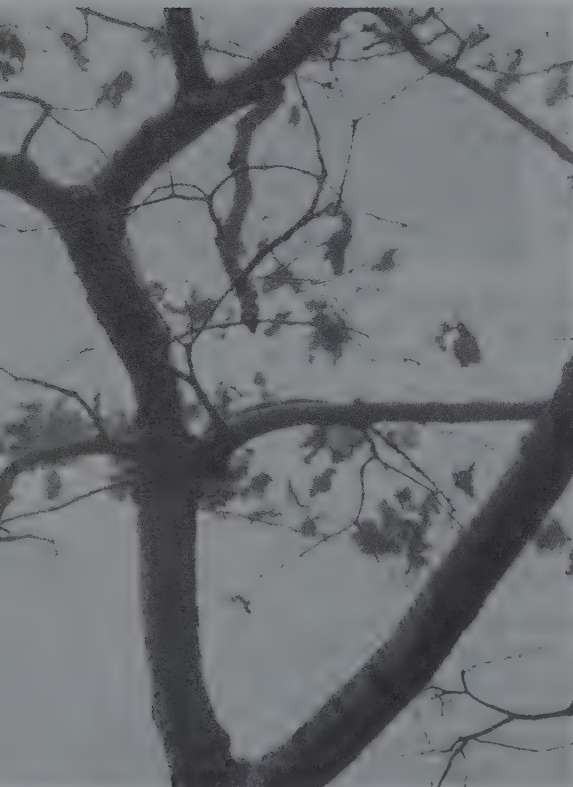
I would be safe if I parked in the back of the office building and entered by the service door.

When I met the security guard the next morning, the first thing he told me was that I must begin parking at the back of the building and entering by the service door.

Fast-forward again. I didn't feel well. The result of tests and a biopsy was the bad news that I had prostate cancer. My surgeon tried to be reassuring, but he made it clear that until he removed the gland there was no way of knowing whether it had spread.

A week before surgery, I had a dream. I was walking down a dark street in my hometown. I was frightened. I ran. I noticed that the sun was beginning to rise. I

stopped and looked. I was drawn to a large tree by the side of the road that was hollowed out in the middle. I wondered how it could stand. Then I looked up and noticed that the surrounding trees had intertwined their





ranches in the limbs of the large tree, keeping it from falling.

I walked on. I stopped again when I came to a dark alley. I couldn't see what might be at its depth. I ran down and down as fast as I could. When I reached the bottom, I looked in all directions. There was nothing to fear. When I emerged at the far end of the valley, I was safe in the backyard of my childhood home. I awakened with the calm assurance that everything would be all right.

I've been reluctant to mention these and other dream experiences. But when the setting has seemed appropriate, I've shared them. The reaction has been consistent—and quite surprising. Again and again, I've had folks come up to me with stories of their own dreams and visions. My stories seemed to give them permission, often for the first time, to share their own dreams and visions.

### **Out of all of this have come several insights and convictions:**

Learning how to understand dreams is important. Morton Kelsey's book *God, Dreams and Revelation* (Augsburg Fortress, 1991) is one of the best resources. Kelsey, an Episcopal clergyman, is a pioneer in the field of dream interpretation.

Journaling dreams that are especially vivid is essential. Often it is in writing that certain symbols or places or objects in the dream begin to unfold into an insight.

Talking about a dream with a trusted, understanding friend is helpful. Though someone else cannot tell us the meaning of a dream, they can often ask questions that will help us open a door to deeper insight.

Reading the Bible becomes a refreshing adventure. I discovered, for example, that it's hard to find a significant event



in the Bible that is not accompanied by a dream or a vision. If we believe in a God who transcends our world yet is able to break into it in unexpected ways, why should we rule out, or try to explain away, dreams and visions in the Bible? If we believe that God can communicate with us in the world of conscious life, is it really so difficult to believe that God might also have something to share with us in our unconscious life—and especially when our guard is down and we are more likely to listen?



*Herbert W. Chilstrom was the first presiding Bishop of the ELCA, the former Bishop of the Minnesota Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, a college professor of religion, and an academic dean. He is retired and lives in Pelican Rapids, Minn., with his wife, Corinne.*

- Most dreams have little to do with predicting what will happen in the future. In fact, some experts in the field doubt that any of them have this purpose. Rather, dreams are aids to help us get deeper insight into issues at hand.
- Dreams are personal. They are not intended to give us a platform for telling someone else what to do or not to do.
- Central to our life in Christ and our life together in the church is Word and Sacrament. Whatever other gifts we may receive must be subservient to, and judged by, the gospel. After mentioning many gifts of the Spirit and suggesting that it is only a partial list, Paul goes on to say that over and above all of them is “a still more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31). That more excellent way is the way of love. And as Paul reminds us over and over again in all of his letters, love is rooted in the cross and the resurrection. And, “if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14). And so, we might add, our dreams are in vain unless they give us insight into our life in Christ.

Do dreams come from above or do they merely come out of the complicated fabric of our psyche? In my opinion, dreams are some of both. I cannot rule out the strong sense that some dreams come as gifts from God. **LWT**



# A vision of healing

Stephen P. Gerhard

Author Reynolds Price encountered Jesus on the Galilean shore. I suspect he did not seek such an extraordinary experience. One summer morning, while his head spun with the circular arguments surrounding a decision on a risk-laden treatment for his spinal cancer, Price was transported from his bed in Orange County, North Carolina, to the "big lake of Kinnereth," the Sea of Galilee. Price shares this vision in his book *A Whole New Life*.

In the vision, Price encounters Jesus. The vision was not an interruption of reality for Price. For him it occurred with "no palpable seam in the texture of time or place." Price's consuming desire for physical healing deafened him to the better portion of sin forgiven. Yet the ever-patient Jesus he met threw in as a bonus what Price craved.

Perfect healing is the healing of faith. I take great comfort in the prayer of a radiologist in the congregation I formerly served, when at the Sunday morning gathering of Christ's body he affirmed, "Lord Jesus, you heal all—some instantly, some over time, and all at the resurrection."

I currently have cancer myself, and now, along with Price, I pray for physical healing. I do so knowing that it might not be given, and knowing it is not essential to my life, my life in Christ. I know the perfect healing of faith—trusting Jesus' final earthly promise to be with us always.

I receive great consolation from Price's vision, probably in the spirit of Paul's words to the Roman church: "Rejoice with those who rejoice" (Romans 12:15). As a member of the body of Christ, I have claimed Price's vision as my own. See what you think as you read a short excerpt from *A Whole New Life* (pages 14-15).

*Stephen P. Gerhard serves as pastor of Lutheran Church of the Epiphany in Winston-Salem, N.C.*

In addition to reading *A Whole New Life: An Illness and a Healing*, you may want to seek out Reynolds Price's most recent book, *Letter to a Man in the Fire*. Published in 1998, it is a lecture given at Auburn Seminary, New York City, in the form of an open letter in response to a medical student fighting colon cancer who, upon reading *A Whole New Life*, wrote Price with two questions: "Does God exist?" and, "Does he care?" —SPG

REYNOLDS

PRICE

A  
WHOLE  
NEW  
LIFE

AN ILLNESS  
AND A HEALING

AN EXCERPT FROM

# A Whole New Life\*

*Reynolds Price*

Still sleeping around me on the misty ground were a number of men in the tunics and cloaks of first-century Palestine. I soon understood with no sense of surprise that the men were Jesus' twelve disciples and that he was nearby asleep among them. So I lay on a while in the early chill, looking west across the lake to Tiberias, a small, low town, and north to the fishing villages of Capernaum and Bithsaida. I saw them as they were in the first century—stone huts with thatch-and-mud roofs, occasional low towers, the rising smoke of breakfast fires. The early light was a fine mix of tan and rose. It would be a fair day.

Then one of the sleeping men woke and stood. I saw it was Jesus, bound toward me. He looked much like the lean Jesus of Flemish paintings—tall with dark hair, unblemished skin and a self-possession both natural and imposing.

Again I felt no shock or fear. All this was normal human event; it was utterly clear to my normal eyes and was happening as surely as any event of my previous life. I lay and watched him walk on nearer.

Jesus bent and silently beckoned me to follow.

I knew to shuck off my trousers and jacket, then my shirt and shorts. Bare, I followed him.

He was wearing a twisted white cloth round his loins; otherwise he was bare and the color of ivory.

We waded out into cool lake water 20 feet from shore till we stood waist-deep.

I was in my body, but I also was watching my body from slightly upward and behind. I could see the purple

---

\* From *A Whole New Life*, by Reynolds Price (Atheneum, 1994), pages 42-44, used by permission.



dye on my back, the long rectangle that boxed my thriving tumor.

Jesus silently took up handfuls of water and poured them over my head and back till water ran down my puckered scar. Then he spoke once—"Your sins are forgiven"—and turned to shore again, done with me.

I came on behind him, thinking in standard greedy fashion, *It's not my sins I'm worried about*. So to Jesus' receding back, I had the gall to say, "Am I also cured?"

He turned to face me, no sign of a smile, and finally said two words: "That, too." Then he climbed from the water, not looking round, really done with me.

I followed him out and then, with no palpable seam in the texture of time or place, I was home again in my wide bed.

Was it a dream I gave myself in the midst of a catnap, thinking I was awake? Was it a vision of the sort described by mystics of differing degrees of sanity throughout human history? From the moment my mind was back in my own room, no more than seconds after I'd left it, I've believed that the event was an external gift, however brief, of an alternate time and space in which to live through a crucial act.

For me the clearest support for that conclusion survives on paper in my handwriting. I've mentioned the sparseness of my calendar notes—hard happenings only, not thoughts or speculations. And in my calendar for 1984, at the top of the space for Tuesday, July 3, I've drawn a small star and written:

*6 a.m.—by Kinnereth, the bath, "Your sins are forgiven"—"Am I cured?"—"That, too."*

I remain as aware as anyone of the highly suspect sound of my claim, but it's the only guess that seems to cover the hard facts. Above all, the event had a concrete visual and tactile reality unlike any sleeping or waking dream I've known or heard of, and it betrayed none of the surreal logic or disjointed plot of an actual dream. Even more convincingly, if it was a dream constructed by my mind to strengthen itself on the verge of an undertaking as destructive as five weeks of ionizing radiation—and since I was later to undergo even more daunting ventures on my body—then why did my mind never again award me a similar consolation in greater crises? **LWT**



# Ancient and biblical dreams

Robert Karl Gnuse

*Looking at the history of dreams can help us better understand the dreams in the Bible.*

In the ancient world of the Near East, especially Egypt and Mesopotamia (6500-500 B.C.), and in the classical world of Greece and Rome (750 B.C.—A.D. 500), dreams were understood to be either messages from the gods or predictions of the future. We possess ancient lists of dream *omina* (from the Latin word meaning “omen” or “sign”), which interpret the dreams of everyday people by explaining what a particular dream scene might mean. An *omina* list could contain hundreds of examples. A Mesopotamian example reads, “If a man eats a raven, income will increase for him.” If a person had a dramatic dream, he or she would go to a priest or magician who specialized in dream interpretation for help unraveling the dream’s meaning.

## DREAM-REPORT FORMULAS

In literary texts and royal inscriptions from 2500 B.C. onward in the ancient Near East, we see “dream-report formulas.” In literature, the dream would spin out a plot by foreshadowing the future for the hero. Kings and priests would tell dream reports of how a deity came to advise them in the affairs of state. Dream reports were either (1) an “auditory message dream” in which the deity appeared to the dreamer at night and spoke a verbal message, or (2) a “symbolic visual dream” in which the dreamer pictured a scene that told of future events or warned of bad things to come.



These two patterns also are found in the later Hellenistic (Greek) texts, where a new format, the “dream image,” appears. In a dream image, a person from the other realm (usually a god or a deceased friend) stands and speaks a message to the dreamer.

## DREAMS IN THE BIBLE

When we come to the Bible, we discover a long list of dreams: Abraham (Genesis 15), Abimelech (Genesis 20), Jacob (Genesis 28—the image of the ladder, 31, 46), Laban (Genesis 31), Joseph (two in Genesis 37), a butler (Genesis 40), a baker (Genesis 40), a pharaoh (two dreams in Genesis 41), Balaam (two in Numbers 22), a Midianite (Judges 7), Samuel (1 Samuel 3), Solomon (1 Kings 3, 9), Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2, 4), Joseph (Matthew 1, three in Matthew 2), the Wise Men (Matthew 2), Pilate’s wife (Matthew 27), perhaps Cornelius (Acts 10), perhaps Peter (Acts 10), and perhaps Paul (Acts 16, 18, 27, but not his conversion). That’s quite a list!

Usually, we consider the experiences of Amos (Amos 7-8), Zechariah (Zechariah 1-8), and Daniel (Daniel 7-11), and the book of Revelation not to be dreams but visions, or day-visions, waking visions. Some of the reports in Acts may be waking visions instead of nighttime dreams. In the end, we are not really sure what the real differences are between dreams and visions.

Biblical dream accounts—which arose between 900 B.C. and A.D. 100—follow very closely the ancient literary formats. This is especially true for the verbal-message dreams of Abraham, Abimelech, Jacob, Laban, Balaam, Samuel, Solomon, Joseph (in Matthew), the magi, and Peter (“The Lord came to so-and-so in a dream by night and said ...”). In these accounts God speaks directly to the dreamer, but without being seen (as in the dream reports of other cultures), and gives a message of warning, directions for movement, or a promise of hope.

The dream reports in Matthew 1 and 2, for example, deliberately use the language of the dream reports in Genesis to show that God directed Jesus’ family just as God guided the patriarchs. The visual symbolic dreams of Joseph in Genesis, the butler, the baker, the pharaoh, the Midianite, and Nebuchadnezzar (note that most of these individuals were pagans) usually predicted future

events, as elsewhere in the ancient world. But they could be interpreted only by a prophet inspired by God, not by a diviner using dream-interpretation techniques. Finally, the dreams or visions of Paul in Acts 16 and 18 have a man or angel speak to him in the format of the later Hellenistic dream-image report.

## DIVINE REVELATION

Above all, it is important to realize that the biblical authors recorded the religious experiences of people who had a divine revelation. Such experiences are indescribable mystical experiences and are beyond literal description. So, the biblical authors simply chose a literary format to recall these experiences. Whatever is portrayed by the author, the reports of dreams, day-visions, or grand theophanies (appearances of God) are literary devices used to present the experience of the divine to the readers. We can never know exactly what was experienced by the original people.

Biblical dream reports testify to a gracious and majestic God who directs and protects believers. Today we probably do not hear God speaking directly to us, as in these older narratives, but we experience God in other ways. The biblical authors who created these texts certainly would affirm our experience of the presence of God in our own lives today. **LWT**

*Robert Karl Gnuse is a professor of Hebrew Bible at Loyola University in New Orleans. He has written 10 books in biblical studies and is part-time interim pastor at Good Shepherd Lutheran in Marrero, La.*

# Twins talk to Rebekah

*Kathryn Swanson*



My sister Kathleen and I (that's us, above) were asked to write about Esau and Jacob by *LWT* partly because we are twins. We have to admit, however, that we had never really been drawn to the story of Jacob and Esau. But, as we read the ancient story again and talked some more, we found ourselves fascinated with the discomfiting and decisive part Rebekah played in the story. We wrestled with what it could mean for us and for others of our day. And that's how you happen to be "listening in" on this imagined conversation that a contemporary set of twins had with Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau.



**Kathleen:** How could you do that, Rebekah? First of all, favoritism among your sons isn't exactly fair—as twins we cut our teeth on “fair,” and we know favoritism is frequently a cause of family fights. Then you helped Jacob deceive his old, ill, and blind father as well as his twin brother, Esau. It seems like a great recipe for sibling rivalry! How could you, Rebekah?

**Rebekah:** I felt that by doing what I did, I was able to cooperate with God in fulfilling God's purpose. It seemed as if the boys were quarreling, inside of me, even before they were born. The Lord told me that “one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:22-23). God must have given me the power to carry out that vision. So I felt strengthened to go against my husband's wishes and the culture of the day.

**Kathryn:** I'll lay it on the table. Many people think you're a conniving schemer and think of Jacob as a cheater and a fraud.

**Rebekah:** (*sighing*) I understand, and I have wrestled with the guilt of my own actions. It is a source of wonder to me that God works through ordinary, flawed individuals like myself, Isaac, and Esau and Jacob. I loved both the boys, but I admit I felt Jacob was deserving of the blessing at the time. I believe God gave me the courage and wit to stand up for what I felt was right.

**Kathryn:** Maybe Jacob got Isaac's blessing and Esau was blessed with the grace to eventually forgive and accept.

**Rebekah:** I like that thought.

**Kathleen:** Rebekah, your strength and ingenuity challenge us. Perhaps we haven't given you enough credit for your willingness to be in the struggle, and for your part in nurturing the faith of your sometimes difficult sons. We don't embrace your methods, but it seems as though your intent was to participate with God.

**Kathryn:** All women and men of the Bible—indeed all folks through the ages—have both strengths and shortcomings. It seems, however, that in Scripture and church history, men are often remembered more for their strength and leadership: the good things they did. And women, if included at all, are often remembered for their sins while their contributions go unnoticed.

**Rebekah:** True. So tell me, what is it like in your family? What about being twins?

**Kathryn:** Well, I'm the youngest by 17 minutes, but in our culture and in our family I didn't have to worry about missing out on any blessing. In fact, our parents went out of their way to treat us equitably. I think we both felt equally loved, equally challenged to be all that we could be. Of course, there were times when

I felt a twinge of competition with my twin, and that feeling has persisted into adulthood.

**Kathleen:** Sibling rivalry is a very human condition. Like Esau and Jacob, our paths—so intertwined in childhood—have taken us in different directions. Each of us has struggled to discover God's will for our life, and then we've each wrestled with how to go about doing it.

**Kathryn:** And at various times each of us wondered if the choices we made were right. Clearly, the struggle is something we have in common with your twins!

**Kathleen:** Maybe that's part of what's meant by wrestling with God: Struggling to find God's better way for our own lives! And like Jacob and Esau, we wrestle with what we perceive to be God's will for our lives. How do we find God's way? How do we listen to God, and what do we hear? Do we wrestle with the greed that can suffocate the goodness inside us?

**Kathryn:** Perhaps we need a Rebekah in our lives, to intervene, to call us to action, to show us another direction.

**Rebekah:** You're right. It is important for women to have mentors and to be mentors. In your day, it seems to me women have far more opportunities to exert leadership, to effect change, to answer God's call to service in ways that weren't open to women in my day. When I look at your world, I wonder: Are you aware of what an amazing gift that is?

Rebekah's "words" echo down the ages and call us to be brave "wrestlers" in our own time and place. We are called to follow a caring God, whose strong and gentle arms embrace both the oppressed and the oppressor, whose love and grace shine right through the shortcomings of the human beings God calls into service. Rebekah's twin sons, like my twin and me, our other siblings, and our brothers and sisters around the world, are blessed by a God who knows us through and through and loves and calls us still! **LWT**



*Twins Kathryn Swanson (left) and Kathleen Hurty collaborated on this piece, with Kathryn serving as writer. Their sister, Karen Parker, and brother, Kemp Segerhammar, also helped collaborate. Kathryn, Thousand Oaks, Calif., is the retired director of Women's Programs and Creative Options at California Lutheran University. Kathleen, New York City, is the general director of Church Women United.*



# Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah

*Beverly J. Stratton*

Genesis 24-36 introduces three strong women—Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah—whose humanity we recognize as our own. They have complex family relationships and individual personalities with the various longings, traits, strengths, and quirks that make us human.

**Rebekah** could be the compelling God-filled heroine of an Andrew Greeley novel. The servant who arranges Rebekah's marriage to Isaac and the people of Abimelech's court recognize her astonishing beauty (24:16, 26:7). Isaac loves her and so is comforted after his mother's death (24:67).

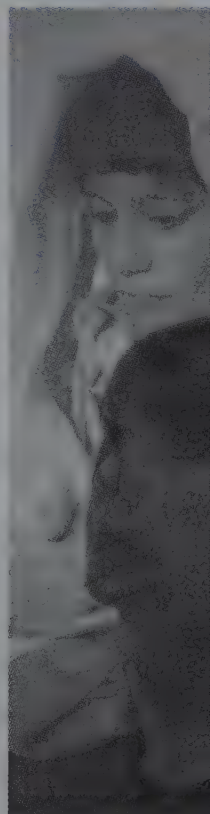
Rebekah also is an independent thinker. She makes her own decision to leave her family and home to go with a stranger to marry a man she's never met (24:58). Then she falls off her camel at the sight of Isaac (24:64)!

Rebekah talks with God; she does not simply overhear God's conversations with her spouse as Sarah did (18:10). Rebekah asks God about the twins Jacob and Esau, who struggle even before they are born. God reveals to Rebekah that God's promises to Abraham will be handed down through their youngest child (25:22-23).

Rebekah ensures that God's will is carried out—through patient waiting, careful listening (27:5-6), and crafty opportunism (25:5-10). When Isaac plans to hand on the blessing to Esau, Rebekah makes sure that Jacob, God's chosen and her favorite, listens to her commanding voice (27:8, 13, 43). Jacob somewhat reluctantly obeys, deceiving Isaac in order to obtain the blessing that Rebekah believes God intends for him.

When the deceiving Jacob is himself deceived by Rebekah's crafty brother, Laban, Rebekah's nieces, Rachel and Leah, become co-wives as well as sisters (29:23).

**Rachel** is a shepherd—a beautiful woman who quickens Jacob's desire and moves him to tears and feats of



great strength when he meets her at the Bible's standard courtship spot, the town well (29:9-11). Rachel has Jacob's heart, love, and attention throughout their marriage (29:20,30).

What Rachel doesn't have are Jacob's children. Plagued by her infertility, she pleads with Jacob, who responds only in frustration (30:1-2). Like Jacob's grandmother Sarah, Rachel resorts to desperate measures: first giving her maid Bilhah to Jacob to bear children on her behalf (30:3-4), then hiring out Jacob's sexual attentions to Leah in exchange for a plant with aphrodisiac qualities (30:14-15). When the Lord finally remembers Rachel and she bears sons, her sons Joseph and Benjamin are Jacob's favorites. Hers also is the most protected spot when danger looms (33:2).

**Leah**, Rachel's older sister, like other firstborn children in Genesis, finds herself less favored and less loved (29:30). Laban tricks Jacob into marrying Leah when Jacob longs for Rachel (29:21). In so doing, Leah's father seems almost to "unload her" on Jacob (29:23,26). With almost each son she bears Jacob, Leah hopes that this one finally will cause her husband to love her (29:31-34; 30:20). She even resorts to buying Jacob's sexual attention, since he otherwise ignores her (30:16).

Like Jacob, the women who surround him are determined. They follow their passions and achieve their purposes. They seek love, crave children, and negotiate blessings. They also are human. They feel inner turmoil, detached neglect, and barren envy. Their relationships are not perfect. They resort to deceit to accomplish their will, engage in jealous rivalries, and suffer lonely, aching longing for love.

These women's lives are like our own. Like Rebekah, we inquire of God when something troubles us inside, and we use our ingenuity to carry out God's will. Like Leah, we are confident that God sees our afflictions, listens to our cries, and hears us when we feel unloved. Even if we sometimes, in desperation, expect others to solve our problems or if we turn to other gods, as Rachel does, these Genesis narratives, together with the Christmas and Easter stories, give us confidence that God has taken away our disgrace. As God remembered Rachel, so God remembers us. **LWT**

*Beverly J. Stratton is an associate professor of religion at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, where she teaches the book of Genesis.*



# Climbing Jacob's Ladder

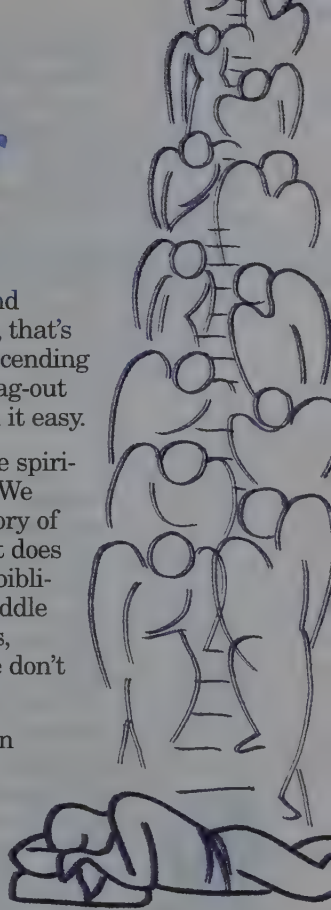
Lorraine S. Brugh

**We are climbing Jacob's ladder ...** Ladders and angels—that's the stuff of dreams. And for Jacob, that's only the beginning. It's angels ascending and descending on a ladder; later, there will be a knock-down, drag-out all-nighter with God. No one ever said Jacob had it easy.

Jacob is not the only person in this song. As the spiritual tells the story of Jacob, we are also present. We are the singers who sing again and again this story of Jacob. Part of the genius of the spiritual is that it does not just recount for us an important moment in biblical history. Rather, it thrusts us right into the middle of the story. Here we are, 21st-century Christians, climbing on Jacob's ladder. Like Jacob, maybe we don't have it so easy either.

African American slaves incorporated their own experiences into the spirituals they composed. They sang and danced the spirituals in a form called a "ring shout." Singers danced in a counter-clockwise circle, combining the motion of the circle dance with the sounds of feet brushing the ground, hands clapping, voices singing, perhaps a drum beating. Sound and motion combined to draw worshipers into a new time, a time in which they took part. The music and dance drew them into communal experience. The time of the spiritual was the time of Jacob, and it was also their time. Like Jacob, they didn't have it so easy either.

**Ev'ry round goes higher, higher ...** This image may be a little confusing for contemporary Christians. It may sound as if we are reaching toward God. It may even seem we are trying to climb up to God. However, John B. Lovell Jr., a historian who has studied spirituals, comments that in this spiritual the slave poet is expressing "his determination to rise from his low estate and to progress up the material and spiritual ladder, 'round by round'" (*Black Song: The Forge and the Flame*, New York:



*A stairway ...  
from earth to  
heaven.  
(Genesis 28:12)*

Macmillan, 1972, p. 119). Here the slaves read themselves right into the biblical story from their own historical position. The final line of each stanza makes more sense with this interpretation. "Soldiers of the cross" is then the description of those who are struggling for their own place and their own advancement. Those are fighting words.

***Sinner, do you love my Jesus? ...*** Where did Jesus come from? Jesus is in the New Testament. How did he get into the Genesis story? The spirituals frequently remind us that all time is God's time. Just as we can enter Jacob's story, so can Jesus. More important, if Jesus can enter Jacob's story, then Jesus can also enter our story. That is the real point.

Jesus is the Lord of all time and space. Jesus is alive in our time, just as he was in Jacob's. The spiritual itself is an embodiment of the truth that all time is God's time.

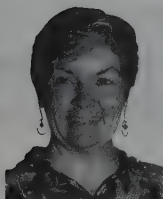
Humans experience time in linear sequence. God's time is not so limited. The spiritual creates a thicker sense of time, attempting to strain beyond human limits to express divine relationship.

***If you love him, why not serve him?*** Now the

spiritual moves us to action. It is not enough to recount Jacob's story; we have to enter it. It is not enough to love Jesus; now we have to act on his behalf. The genius of the spiritual is that it doesn't allow for observers; no bystanders here. Just as the circle dance involved all who were gathered, so the spiritual calls each one to action for Jesus.

***Ev'ry round goes higher, higher ...*** By now we see that the song is a metaphor for each community that sings it. For the slave community, this stanza may have expressed hope that there would be better times. It also expressed the urgency and determination for change. The sound and motion of the circle dance would have combined to draw worshipers into a new time. Perhaps it provided the slaves a vision for a new time, a time of freedom and an end to oppression.

The time of the spiritual is time in the now. It is the time of Jacob, of Jesus, of me. Each time we sing the spiritual, a new time is created. We step into the circle in our own time, dancing and singing. We praise the God who is the Lord of all time. This is Jacob's God, and mine, and yours. **[MT]**



*Lorraine S. Brugh, an ELCA Associate in Ministry, is an assistant professor of music and Kruse Organ Fellow at Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Ind.*

# IdeaNet

March 2000 • Vol. 3, Number 6

For Mission Together

## Extending the family

When my then-fiancé and I were planning our wedding, he suggested a small ceremony and reception for “family and close friends only.” Occupied with full-time college classes and part-time jobs, I left the chore of invitations to my mother and future mother-in-law.

Expecting 30–40 people or so, my husband was surprised to learn that for my mother the term *family* included cousins three-times-removed, *padrinos* (godparents) and *compadres* (close family friends), and their families. The church tilted to one side as it overflowed with more than 250 close friends and my “family” members!

So whom do we consider “family” in our congregational units and circles? And how do we extend ourselves to be welcoming to all our sisters, especially those women whose backgrounds and life circumstances differ greatly from ours?

Almost 20 years ago, my husband and I joined St. Paul Lutheran Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. One Sunday, I read in the church bulletin that

the women’s evening circle would be meeting that week, so I made plans to attend.

Imagine our mutual surprise when I, a 27-year-old Mexican American, walked into a small group of women of Northern European descent with an average age of 60. The woman closest to me in age was about 50, almost twice my age. I can still remember their wide eyes and warm smiles as they welcomed me to their group!

It was in this group, however, that I first learned that I do, indeed, have something in common with all the women of this church—a love for Jesus Christ and a desire to be in community to serve him. Over the years, these women supported me through their prayers, love, and encouragement.

In my travels to synodical conventions representing churchwide Women of the ELCA, I have often been asked, “How do we encourage (*name your subgroup*) women to participate in our congregational activities?”

I always turn the question back to members of the group, and I hear from them wonderful

(continued)



examples of things they have done to encourage women to participate in their Bible studies, craft fairs, monthly programs, or social ministry activities. Special babysitting arrangements, gift boxes sent to young women attending college, personal invitations to synodical conventions and retreats, and surveys to all the women of their church asking for input are some of the ways that our congregational units are encouraging more women to become active.

Asking for input is a great way to get new ideas, but we need to listen to what is being said. When we recruit new leadership, we need to support them in their decisions, even if they differ from our own. Keeping a positive attitude about changes can help others in the group be more accepting of them.

You can also look for ways that different subgroups of women in your church can help one another. Babysitting during Bible study can be exchanged for transportation to and from an evening event. Ask a young

woman with expertise in finance or computers to facilitate a workshop in exchange for serving at a young women's event. We all benefit when we can be of service to one another in our callings.

All of these examples are grounded in a desire to make our organization more accessible to all women of the church. A smile, an open heart, and a willingness to listen are key elements in helping to extend the family that is Women of the ELCA. We have a wonderful history of service to the church, the community, and the world. By encouraging all women of the church to participate in one way or another, we help to further the mission and purpose of Women of the ELCA.

*Anna Purcella-Doll served Women of the ELCA as a Churchwide Executive Board member during the 1996–1999 triennium. She lives in Suwanee, Georgia, where she is a freelance writer and corporate trainer.*

## IdeaNet

Women of the ELCA *IdeaNet*, a publication of Women of the ELCA, is inserted regularly in *Lutheran Woman Today*. Editor: Barbara Hofmaier. Layout: Bettelou Bruce. Copyright © 2000 Women of the ELCA. All rights reserved.

*IdeaNet* pages may be reproduced for local use by Women of the ELCA in congregations and synodical women's organizations, provided each copy carries the notice "Copyright © 2000 Women of the ELCA, reprinted with permission."



# Postcard Ideas

## Connecting with college students

Our church has a "We Care" committee. Every fall, we obtain the addresses of all college students from the church office. Volunteers—men and women—pick a student and write notes, send cards, remember birthdays and holidays, and clip tidbits of advice to share with the student. We try to keep in touch with these young people until they have finished school or are out on their own. This helps them stay connected with their home church.

*Liz Butterbrodt  
Grace English Lutheran  
Berlin, Wis.*

## Helpful tip for church suppers

Our monthly "Lunch Bunch" seniors' group came up with the idea of placing the silverware and napkins at the *end* of the serving table. It's easier for people to walk through the line without having to hold anything but a plate. We're using this idea at all our potluck dinners now—it works great for parents helping young children as well.

*Nancy Ulland  
Grace Lutheran  
Round Rock, Texas*

## Lutheran World Relief schoolbags

To encourage members of our congregation to get involved assembling Lutheran World Relief schoolbags, our sewing group sewed the bags using upholstery and drapery samples given to us by local businesses. We stapled to each bag a list of what to put inside and made the bags available during July and August, when school supplies are on sale. People took them home to fill. This year we had 120 schoolbags to send to LWR.

*Loretta Dahlin  
Cambridge Lutheran  
Cambridge, Minn.*

## Flexible meeting places

For the last 10 years, since a member of our evening circle had a stroke at midlife, our group has held its monthly Bible studies at the nursing home. We extend an invitation to residents of all faiths, and often as many as 20 attend. We meet at 7:00 p.m. and read and discuss uplifting faith-based articles, most often from *Lutheran Woman Today*. We visit together and have light refreshments. The residents retire by 8:00, and the circle does the LWT Bible study.

This circle also makes the banners that are given to each

infant at baptism. The banners include the name, the date, and a blessing.

*Shirley Kehne  
Zion Lutheran  
Creighton, Neb.*

## **Expanding our reach abroad and at home**

We have been sending our monthly *Lutheran Woman Today* magazines to a former Rebecca Circle member who is living in Belgium for a few years. She is organizing a Bible study there, giving our magazine issues a second life of usefulness.

Because many of our members spend winter months in warmer climes, we meet all 12 months of the year. Frequently, we have more attending in June, July, and August than in January, February, and March. Schoolteachers are often more likely to be able to attend in summer, as well as those who may be prevented from coming during the winter by snow or bouts with colds and flu.

*Carlotta Biefeldt  
First English Lutheran  
Peoria, Ill.*

## **Ecumenical partnerships**

Our Women of the ELCA unit works with women of other denominations to plan ecumenical Lenten services in our city. A service is held on Wednesday at noon for each week in Lent in one of six churches. The pastors

of the churches meet together to plan the theme of the services. Members from each church plan the meal to be served on the day their pastor preaches. The women also plan the Lenten devotions offered on our local radio station.

Women also plan for the World Day of Prayer in our city—where the service will be held and who is responsible for each part. Both projects are part of Church Women United in our county.

We truly enjoy working with women of all the churches in our community and get to know many of them personally.

*Arlene Riemer  
Brodhead, Wis.*

## **Celebrating the ordained women among us**

This year the ELCA observes the 30th anniversary of the ordination of women. How does your unit or synodical organization honor, support, and involve women clergy in Women of the ELCA? Please send your ideas to *IdeaNet* by May 2, 2000, for publication in a later issue.

Send all  
**Postcard  
Ideas**  
to

**Women of the ELCA IdeaNet**  
8765 W. Higgins Rd.  
Chicago, IL 60631-4189  
Email: [IdeaNet@elca.org](mailto:IdeaNet@elca.org)



# **In God's Image**

## **A Study of Genesis**

*Terence E. Fretheim*



### **SESSION 7**

## **Wrestling in Faith**

### **STUDY TEXTS**

**Genesis 25:19-28; 28:10-22;  
29:31—30:24; 32:22-32**

### **MEMORY VERSE**

Know that I am with you and  
will keep you wherever you go.  
(Genesis 28: 15a)

### **OVERVIEW**

Jacob is a trickster. He tricks his brother, his father, and his uncle. Yet God chooses him: Jacob's other name is Israel, and for good reason. In time, his 12 sons become the 12 tribes of Israel.

In these texts we learn of Jacob as well as his parents, Isaac and Rebekah, and his wives, Leah and Rachel. Once again, women play a positive and vital role in the story.

Yet this is a dysfunctional family. They are often are in conflict with one another and with their neighbors, engaging in acts of deception and trickery. In these texts they wrestle with one another, and with God. It is remarkable that even tricksters and wrestlers have gifts that God can use.

### **OPENING**

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;  
for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.  
(Psalm 23:4)

## GOD WITH US

The people in Genesis do a lot of traveling. And God travels with them. We have seen such journeying with Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham, and we will see it again in the story of Joseph. Travel also shapes the lives of Jacob and his family. Jacob often is on the run, yet God promises to care for him wherever he goes. This is an individual and a family on the go, with God.

**1. Read Genesis 25:19-28.** In what way is Rebekah (25:21) like Sarah (16:1)? Rebekah inquires of God during her troubled pregnancy. Think of a time in your life when you inquired of God. What was the response?

Although God has not caused the trouble, God responds by interpreting the wrestling of the boys in the womb to mean that the firstborn child (Esau) will serve the younger (Jacob). As it turns out, Rebekah prefers Jacob and Isaac prefers Esau. Such preferential treatment is not uncommon among parents. But Rebekah may prefer Jacob because of God's word to her (and she did not tell Isaac about it).

**2.** Perhaps God spoke the word to Rebekah so that she would work on God's and Jacob's behalf. Later, how does she? **See Genesis 27:5-13, 42-46.**

Rebekah is right to think that God's word about Jacob and Esau does not set their future in stone. What people do with the word they have received counts in the shaping of their future. Their words and deeds make a difference in how things turn out. God has chosen not to work alone in the world. Rather, God works through the words and actions of human beings.

Think about Rebekah a bit more. God's word to Rebekah, in effect, enlists her help on behalf of God's choice of Jacob, and she responds by playing a very active role in his life.

Some people may think she is manipulative at times, but perhaps her manipulative moves are necessary because of the patriarchal authority in this family. God has been known to work for the good of a family through other manipulative people from time to time!

God does not make people perfect before deciding to work through them. Jacob and Esau also shape the story by manipulative actions. At the same time, these people have their gifts. Note that, in response to Jacob's hesitance in 27:13, Rebekah expresses a resolve to take upon herself the consequences should anything go wrong.

## SIBLING RIVALRY

Before moving to the next text, we should review what happens to Jacob in the meantime (25:29—28:9). The conflict between Jacob and Esau that began in the womb continues. Jacob cheats his brother out of his rights as firstborn and then obtains his father's deathbed blessing, which was rightfully Esau's. Because of Esau's understandable anger, Jacob has to flee, and does so with the help of his mother. He goes to Haran, where Laban, his mother's brother, lives. On his way out of the country, God encounters him.

## AN AMAZING DREAM

**3. Read Genesis 28:10-15.** Would you consider God's word to Jacob a command, a promise, or both?

This event occurs while Jacob is running from his brother's anger. Although he was confident earlier, now he is vulnerable and afraid, on a strange road to a strange land. God's promises ring in fearful Jacob's ears. These are remarkably gracious words for the person Jacob has shown himself to be!

**4.** Compare God's promises here to those made to others in Genesis. Read the text, then use the chart on page 28 to check those things that were promised to the recipient.



text	recipient of promise	land	descendants	nation	blessing
17:1-8	Abraham				
17:15-16	Sarah				
17:20; 21:13	Ishmael				
28:3-4, 13-14	Jacob				

To these are added promises in view of Jacob's personal situation—promises of God's presence and care during his journey (28:15).

In Jacob's interesting dream, notice that only angels climb the ladder, accompanying God (28:12). Jacob does not! God comes to him and stands beside him. Jacob does not have to climb up to God! Nor do we. God has come to us!

**5. Read Genesis 28:16-22,** Jacob's response to God. What does he admit in 28:16? Notice the "if" in his vow (28:20-22). Have you ever bargained with God like this?

Jacob didn't realize that God was with him on this dangerous journey. In times of danger, we often fail in similar ways. When we find ourselves on such journeys, we can hang onto this story (and other texts, such as Psalm 23).

God was present with Jacob even though there was no building called a "house of God." This place, in the middle of nowhere, was a "house of God" for Jacob (the phrase is a translation of the Hebrew word "Beth-el"). God was so close to him that it was like being at the gates of heaven. This is not an argument against church buildings, where we can count on hearing God's promises spoken clearly on a regular basis. But God is not present with us only in church buildings!

## ALL'S FAIR IN LOVE AND WAR?

The storyline continues with Jacob working for his uncle Laban (29:1-30). Jacob wants to marry Rachel, but Laban tricks him into marrying both of his daughters.

**6. Read Genesis 29:31—30:24.** Who names the children? What seems to inspire the names?

Women play the dominant role in this story. Notice how often they give thanks to God; they see the links between their own experience and what God is about in the world.

Jacob obviously is the father of these children, but notice how small and ambiguous a role he is given. His angry speech to Rachel is the only time he is given words in this story (30:2). Notice his abuse of Leah, which is assumed from her words in 29:31-34 and 30:20. (Laban has also abused his daughters in 29:23 and 31:14-15.)

Four women are mothers of Jacob's children, but only his wives (Leah and Rachel) speak and give the children names. The slaves, Bilhah and Zilpah, were given to Jacob by his wives to bear children when they thought they could not (or could no longer) do so. Recall Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 16:1-2). Once again, God works through less-than-perfect people to accomplish the divine purpose.

## HEADING HOME

The storyline continues with more trickery between Laban and Jacob. Finally, Jacob and his family leave for Canaan, where much trouble with his estranged brother Esau is anticipated (30:25—32:21). Jacob takes elaborate precautions, sending gifts ahead. Jacob can even pray (32:9-12)!

**7. Read Genesis 32:22-32.** Who else has “seen God face to face” and yet survived (Genesis 16:13)?

You may have to read this strange story more than once to understand what's going on. Remember that Jacob is about to confront his brother Esau, and he is fearful of what might happen.

It is clear from 32:30 that Jacob has been wrestling with "God." God has assumed the form of a human being ("man") and initiated a wrestling match with Jacob. God chooses this means of confronting Jacob because Jacob is a wrestler. God gets down in the dirt with him and engages him in a way familiar to him. Jacob holds his own with God (32:25, 28), even when God tricks the trickster by putting Jacob's hip out of joint (32:25). And God commends him for his successful wrestling!

Could God have "pinned" Jacob during the match at anytime God chose to do so? Probably not, because God has taken human form and assumed a power comparable to Jacob's for this occasion.

Jacob has enough power to hold onto God (32:26). We've all had times, in the toughest moments of our lives, when we have simply "held on" to God. Because of God's promised commitment to us, God can be held to promises made!

Yet God retains the power to give Jacob the blessing he desperately needs for the coming encounter with Esau. God in effect provides a rehearsal for Jacob and breaks the impasse by giving him a blessing and a new name. When Esau treats him favorably, Jacob says that seeing him is "like seeing the face of God" (33:10).

8. "In the night, [God] tends to take on the features of others with whom we struggle in the day" (Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 267). Think of ways in which God has struggled with you. Have you borrowed insights gained in those struggles to use in difficult times?

## LOOKING AHEAD

The next session will deal with the troubling texts of Genesis 34 and 38, difficult stories about several women. Prepare by reading these chapters and learning Genesis 38: 26a. **LWT**

*Terence E. Fretheim is a professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.*

"In God's Image" is prepared by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and edited by Catherine Malotky. Address questions and comments to: Director for Educational Resources, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

Copyright © 2000 Augsburg Fortress. May not be reproduced without permission.



# Who, me? Ordained?

*Glennndy Sculley*

Has someone said to you, "You'd be a good pastor?" (Or have you said to yourself, testing the sound of the words, "Maybe I'd be a good pastor"?)

I wondered for many years whether God was calling me to ordained ministry. When I finally couldn't ignore the question anymore, I started talking to others about it. I asked my family what they thought. I made an appointment to talk with my pastor, and I called my synod office.

I learned that in the ELCA, we talk about both "inner" and "outer" call. My inner call was the sense that God was calling me to ministry. I struggled with that for a long time. Other people—my pastor, family, friends, and finally, the synod's candidacy committee—helped affirm the outer call, the call of the church to serve in a particular role.

**Candidacy** is the word the ELCA uses to describe the process for preparation for professional ministry, whether ordained or lay. The primary keeper of the candidacy process is the synod's candidacy committee, supported by the ELCA's Division for Ministry.

On the same day I called the synod office, I phoned the seminary. Within days, I received big packets in the mail from both places.

Beginning the application process means applying for both admission to the seminary and entrance to the candidacy process. I mailed my forms and a brief autobiography to both the seminary and the candidacy committee, then waited to see what would happen.

Two things happened quickly: I got a letter from the seminary reminding me that before I could be accepted into the Master of Divinity degree program, I needed a "positive entrance decision" by my candidacy committee. The second thing that happened was a telephone call from a member of the candidacy committee inviting me for an initial interview.



I met with Pastor Gary in his study. We prayed together, and then he invited me to talk about some of the things in my autobiography, about my personal sense of God's call, and about my own faith development. We had great fellowship, and I left feeling very affirmed.



The process of approval to enter the candidacy process includes that initial one-on-one interview followed by a psychological evaluation (paid for partly by the synod, partly by the Division for Ministry, and partly by the candidate) and an interview with other members of the candidacy committee.

Once I was approved for entrance into the candidacy process, the seminary sent a letter of acceptance as well. My academic credentials were satisfactory to the seminary; I had already earned a bachelor's degree from an accredited university.

**Seminary study** is fun, with lots of opportunities to strengthen newly developing pastoral skills. Along with Greek and Hebrew, we study church history, the Lutheran Confessions, preaching, pastoral care, and worship. There are many Bible courses required, naturally. The course of theological education also includes contextual or field education, where students participate in worship, teaching, and preaching while being mentored by an experienced pastor.

It helps to be flexible when you're in seminary. Creative ways and times to study become necessary, especially as nontraditional, second-career students often balance combinations of study, marriage, children, and work. The seminaries, too, are working hard to meet the needs of nontraditional students. Many courses are available in the evening, over the Internet, and through independent study.

Sometime during the course of seminary, all Master of Divinity students participate in **Clinical Pastoral Education**. Although this most often is a 10- to 12-week full-time commitment in a hospital setting, part-time, longer-term alternatives in a wide variety

of settings also are available. My CPE experience, in a large urban hospital with a major trauma center, was a profound learning experience. I learned to be a pastor to people in very difficult situations. I also learned to assess my own needs and responses to continually deepen my skills.

Sometime during the second year of seminary, candidates meet again with the candidacy committee for **endorsement**. I was invited into deeper theological reflection, discussion about my sense of call, the meaning of leadership in the church, and prayer. Endorsement by the candidacy committee is necessary before seminarians can go on to internship.

**Internship** ordinarily comes as the third year of seminary study. Internship, which lasts between nine and 12 months, provides seminarians with the chance to be mentored by a skilled pastor and to practice, in carefully selected settings, all aspects of pastoral ministry.

Amy Zalk, a senior at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, said that the internship "gives you an opportunity to be part of the life of a parish and allows you opportunity to work on integrating theology and practice." This integration of theology and practice is a really important part of seminary study. It isn't enough for us to have a lot of head knowledge. We are learning to be pastors and leaders for God's people. That's an awesome task!

After internship and during the fourth year of seminary, candidates meet again with the candidacy committee. This **final step** is the actual approval for ordination. It comes early in the senior year and includes a significant amount of prework essay-and-sermon writing.

Sometime before graduation, approved candidates for ordination are assigned to synods for their **first call**. All candidates are invited to list the synods they would prefer to serve, but there are no guarantees. I already know from my conversations with the candidacy committee that there are many synods (including mine) that don't need many pastors for first calls. But there are many, many others that desperately need first-call pastors. As a candidate, the ELCA expects me to be available to serve where I am needed. I see that as part of my availability to God, too.



*The  
ordination  
process is  
“intensely  
personal  
and  
marvelously  
communal.”*

The whole process of preparation for ordained ministry is both intensely personal and marvelously communal. Throughout the process, my own faith life and my ability to think and speak theologically are growing. At the same time, I am surrounded and supported by the other students at the seminary and encouraged by professors and faculty who are preparing me to be both pastor and colleague. I am nurtured by the prayer and care of my synod's candidacy committee.

Many women seminarians have found that some of our greatest support comes from women clergy. I have intentionally found women pastors who can help me talk and think about what it means to be both a woman and a pastor, and who can help me look honestly at my strengths and weaknesses. Those of us who are now in seminary owe a debt of gratitude to all the women of the past 30 years who have opened so many doors for us.

And finally, we graduate. We are called to serve a congregation of the ELCA, and we are **ordained** into the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The answer is, “Yes, me! Ordained!” **LWT**

*Glennady Sculley is an assistant to the bishop of the Saint Paul Area Synod and a part-time seminary student. She and her husband, Michael, live in St. Anthony, Minn.*

Throughout the year, ELCA congregations will celebrate 30 years of the ordination of women. At the end of 1998 there were 2,228 ordained women in the ELCA, which was 12.4 percent of all (17,589) ordained ministers—a 4.7 percent increase since 1991.

For a list of “30 ways to celebrate 30 years of the ordination of women,” see the ELCA Commission for Women website at [www.elca.org/cw/](http://www.elca.org/cw/) or send a self-addressed stamped envelope to CW/30 Ways, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189. During March, Women's History Month, it might be especially fitting to try idea #17: “Honor leaders in your synod who helped prepare the way for the ordination of women 30 years ago.”

# Best friends

Marj Leegard



As the years go by we are blessed with all sorts of friends—far-away friends, next-door neighbor and next-door neighbor friends, friends whose children married our children, friends united by common sorrow, and friends sharing common joys.

For some of us, our best friend is called “husband.” It is good to be friends with this man who would be a most difficult companion over the span of years if we only romantically loved him. Romance doesn’t count for much when one has flu and the other is on clean-up detail!

The more we enjoy our friends the more we understand Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi standing on that lonely road. Moab was near and Bethlehem far away. They hugged each other and could not part. In tears Naomi prepared to let them return to Moab while she went on

alone to Bethlehem. But only Orpah would do the sensible thing. Ruth would not.

Friendship is seldom sensible. Friendship binds friend with improbable friend. Friends forget hasty words. Friends overlook uneven giving. Friends pick up each other’s lack and make whole a moment. Ruth sang a song to Naomi. No one stands on a road at the beginning of a journey and conceives a poem, but Ruth did. And Ruth’s poem of lyric friendship is held in our hearts:

*I will go where you go,  
I will live where you live;  
your people will be my people,  
your God will be my God.*

(Ruth 1:16, *Contemporary English Version*)

No matter how long ago some of our friendships were formed or how long ago they ended, we are more than we were because we had that friend. I held Alice in my arms after an absence of 51 years, and I cried because she no longer had the long gold braids that shine in my memory. I hug Mildred on Sundays as we part for another week. I cannot protest with Ruth, “I will live where you live.” We have to live apart, my friends and I.

With this vast variety of friends, far apart and near, we are most blessed. **LWT**

*LWT columnist Marj Leegard and her best friend and husband, Jerome (shown above), are members of Bakke-Lund-Richwood parish in Detroit Lakes, Minn.*



# Parental guilt

*Kirsi Stjerna*

Talk about a guilt trip! While I was busily trying to finish an article, my 3-year-old daughter cut her beautiful long hair. How I cried—and how she cried, not sure why, but shocked by my strong reaction. She thought she looked pretty with her new scarecrow-cut. I worried that she might have hurt herself with the scissors. Our confused crying woke up the baby, who joined us, also confused.

*Kirsi Stjerna, an ELCA pastor and historian, and her husband, Rob Blezard, are the parents of Kaleigh and Kristion. They are members of Good Shepherd in Oak Park, Ill.*

Kaleigh had been trying in vain to lure me to play with her. She found the scissors as I asked her to make noise in another room so that she wouldn't wake up her little brother, who was sleeping next to my computer (don't ask why). She even warned me. She came to tell me her play-scissors were too dull—and I didn't listen. Oh, it's so easy to miss the cues our children give us!

I would have burned my computer to bring back her hair. I would have shaved my own head to make her look beautiful again and to get rid of my guilt.

Guilt. Nothing prepared me for the amount of guilt parents deal with. My heart is broken almost daily as I struggle with primal, sometimes even physically manifesting, guilt. I struggle with the productive, "good" guilt that makes me a better mom, I believe, and I struggle with the unnecessary, torturing guilt laid upon me by well-meaning others who second-guess my choices. Whether staying at home with my children, or working outside the home, there isn't a day when I don't go to bed mourning for my failures as a mother—as well as cherishing the holy privilege of having children to love and who love me, unconditionally.

I once asked a fellow pastor, also a mother and employed, how she did it—being a good mother and serving in her other vocation as well. "By the grace of God," she said. I know exactly what she meant.

What carries me and my family through the often hectic days, sustains our tired bodies and stressed minds, and helps us to cherish the precious moments together squeezed between busy routines and over-



loaded schedules, is the grace of God. What gives us the sense of new beginnings and an absolution from daily parental sins is the humbling, comforting experience of being wrapped in the womb God's love. In this holy vocation of parenting, we are, and need to be, embraced by healing grace.

Rituals and liturgies, help us to have the sense of grace and forgiveness. So often I have yearned for a place in worship to pray as a mother, to hear the words of absolution, and affirmation of grace as a mother. Thus I wrote myself a confession. I share it with you here.

*In the name of our eternal God, we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We confess we cannot help being human, especially with our children, and cannot make ourselves perfect parents.*

*We have sinned against you, Divine Parent, as we have hurt our fellow human beings, by what we have done and left undone. We have sinned against our children in thought, word, and deed.*

*We have uttered angry words, shouted, acted impatiently, unfairly, and*

*childishly, and thought unspeakable acts of rage.*

*We have not listened carefully, we have not always been there for our children, we have not been able to kiss away all the tears.*

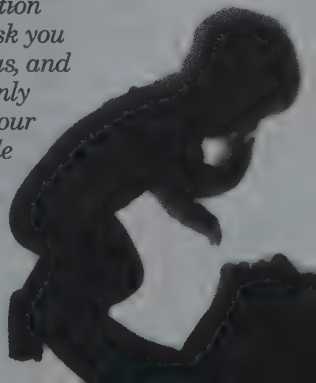
*We have disappointed our children and ourselves. We have made bad choices among all the good choices. We haven't taken every opportunity to unconditionally cherish our children and our neighbor's children.*

*We have not cared for the neglected and needy children among us. We have left many things undone.*

*O God, we feel our failures. We have not made our world a safe place for our innocent ones.*

*We confess, trusting in your mercy and guidance. We plead for peace, forgiveness, and a touch of grace.*

*Our mother and father in heaven and here on earth, we thank you for trusting us with the precious gifts of procreation and parenting. We ask you to forgive us, renew us, and lead us in our heavenly task, so that we, as your images, may resemble your unbroken love, and walk the good path with every child of God. **LWT***





# Giving back in bounty

Ever watch a telethon? There are moving stories and appeals, entertainment, tally boards, and pledges.

The telethon image, however, isn't expansive enough to tell the story of women actively involved in ministry throughout this organization. Our story is more like the actions of a farmer. The farmer, anticipating the harvest, prepares the soil, plants, and trusts the seeds will sprout. The farmer doesn't watch a tally board but believes God will be gracious and provide the harvest.

In like manner, the churchwide women's organization develops a budget in faith (see 2000 budget on page 42). Seeds are planted and cultivated for the harvest through programs, resources, and events. At end of the year, we tally our faithfulness with reports, audits, explanations, and graphs. You can find one of these tallies, the 1998 audit figures, on page 41. These reports, however, do not begin to measure the true harvest of Women of the ELCA as we move ever more faithfully toward living God's justice.

Women of the ELCA is a community of faith, created in the image of God and called to discipleship. The women's ministry and discipleship are matters of commitment, faith, action, healing, and wholeness. These women equip themselves through circles and Bible studies. They serve meals, walk with women and children in crisis, and meet the needs of their local congregations. What a bountiful harvest of women making a difference in the life of the world as they share gifts of time, talents, and treasure for the glory of God. These are women who give because they have heard the promise, "give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Luke 6:38). This is the

## FIVE-YEAR TREND OF TOTAL OFFERINGS

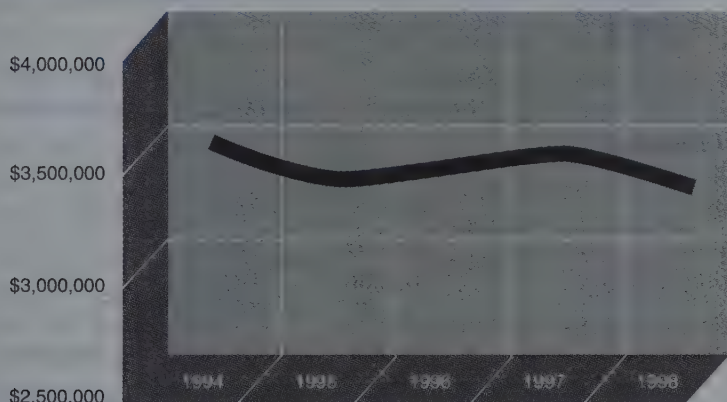


image of Women of the ELCA churchwide giving—a good measure, running over, and giving back in bounty.

In fiscal year 1998, offerings received by the churchwide organization of Women of the ELCA totaled \$3,290,124. This is the tally board flashing your generous support of programs, resources, and training events of the churchwide organization. The seeds from 1999 have been harvested, and the seeds for 2000 are planted and growing. What will the harvest look like? How will the organization respond to the challenge to “Live God’s Justice?” The 2000 budget plans on a measurable increase in giving, more than 25 percent of the 1998 total. The 1999 triennial convention planted seeds of promise with this budget; how will we as an organization respond?

Participants in women’s organizations have been faithfully sowing and reaping the fruits of ministry throughout the past century and continue to do so into the new millennium. May God continue to bless the ministries and mission of Women of the ELCA as we work in faith and trust to harvest what we have been given. **LWT**

*Valora Starr Butler  
Jonathan Kalkwarf  
Catherine Marquis*



## STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDING JANUARY 31, 1999

REVENUE	BUDGET	ACTUAL	PRIOR YEAR
<b>Contributed revenue</b>			
Regular offerings	\$ 1,350,000	\$ 1,075,335	\$ 1,178,476
Thankofferings	1,650,000	1,578,121	1,563,264
Designated gifts	450,000	339,968	403,961
SWO convention offerings	60,000	64,591	66,201
Other offerings	80,000	101,876	104,103
<b>Total contributed revenue</b>	<b>\$ 3,590,000</b>	<b>\$ 3,209,891</b>	<b>\$ 3,316,005</b>
 Endowment contributions	 \$ 0	 \$ 80,233	 \$ 109,101
 <b>Other revenue</b>			
Triennial convention	\$ 1,500	\$ 4,215	\$ 0
Investment/Other Income	409,260	447,932	1,108,569
<b>Total other revenue</b>	<b>\$ 410,760</b>	<b>\$ 452,147</b>	<b>\$ 1,108,569</b>
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>\$ 4,000,760</b>	<b>\$ 3,742,271</b>	<b>\$ 4,533,675</b>
 <b>Program services</b>			
Direct program expenses	\$ 1,062,760	\$ 934,353	\$ 909,806
Communications	197,070	232,547	181,345
<i>Lutheran Woman Today</i>	246,050	258,902	245,579
Other program and training events	60,000	63,472	41,385
Planned giving	120,000	102,081	129,402
Grants, scholarships, and other expenses	304,200	187,867	249,428
<b>Total Program</b>	<b>\$ 1,990,080</b>	<b>\$ 1,779,212</b>	<b>\$ 1,756,945</b>
 Gifts to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	 \$ 1,000,000	 \$ 819,820	 \$ 1,000,000
 <b>MANAGEMENT AND GENERAL</b>			
Governance	\$ 90,000	\$ 83,982	\$ 143,813
Triennial convention	100,000	198,616	159,135
Administration	615,020	527,323	523,854

<b>EXPENSES</b>	<b>BUDGET</b>	<b>ACTUAL</b>	<b>PRIOR YEAR</b>
Total Administration	\$ 805,020	\$ 809,921	\$ 826,802
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>\$ 3,795,100</b>	<b>\$ 3,408,953</b>	<b>\$ 3,583,747</b>
<b>Other Transactions</b>			
Triennial Convention Reserves	\$ 250,000	\$ 250,000	\$ 70,000
Other Fund uses	(44,340)	83,317	879,928
<b>Total Other Transactions</b>	<b>\$ 205,660</b>	<b>\$ 333,317</b>	<b>\$ 949,928</b>
<b>Total Expenditures and Fund Restrictions</b>	<b>\$ 4,000,760</b>	<b>\$ 3,742,270</b>	<b>\$ 4,533,675</b>

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS OF JANUARY 31, 1999 (AUDIT)

<b>ASSETS</b>	<b>1998-1999</b>	<b>1997-1998</b>
Cash	\$ 51,237	\$ 50,300
Investments	6,214,380	5,922,601
Beneficial interest in outside trusts	289,099	261,772
Due from Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	1,527,167	1,467,547
Accounts receivable and other assets	30,142	15,979
Notes receivable (net of allowance for doubtful accounts of \$35,000)	35,000	35,000
Furniture and equipment (net of accumulated depreciation of \$43,765—1/31/99 and \$43,438—1/31/98)	\$ 36,210	\$ 31,297
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>\$ 8,183,235</b>	<b>\$ 7,784,496</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>		
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$ 211,602	\$ 146,181
<b>Net assets</b>		
Unrestricted	\$ 5,324,023	\$ 5,105,044
Temporarily restricted	1,515,806	1,509,028
Permanently restricted	1,131,804	1,024,243
<b>Total net assets</b>	<b>7,971,633</b>	<b>7,638,315</b>
<b>Total liabilities and net assets</b>	<b>\$ 8,183,235</b>	<b>\$ 7,784,496</b>

## WOMEN OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA 2000 BUDGET

<b>REVENUE AND SUPPORT</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>
<b>CONTRIBUTED INCOME</b>	<b>BUDGET</b>	<b>BUDGET</b>
Regular Offerings	\$ 1,432,080	\$ 1,404,000
Thankofferings	1,828,530	1,716,000
Designated Gifts	463,913	445,000
SWO Convention Offerings	70,200	70,000
Other Offerings	91,520	83,200
<b>Total Offerings Available for Current Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 3,886,243</b>	<b>\$ 3,718,200</b>
<b>Endowment Contributions</b>	<b>181,200</b>	<b>151,000</b>
Triennial Convention	3,500	830,000
Investment/Other Income	651,800	590,000
<b>Total Other Income</b>	<b>655,300</b>	<b>1,420,000</b>
<b>Total Revenue and Support</b>	<b>\$ 4,541,543</b>	<b>\$ 5,289,200</b>
Venture Funding	0	188,000
<b>Total Income and Funding Required</b>	<b>\$ 4,722,743</b>	<b>\$ 5,477,200</b>

### ANTICIPATED EXPENDITURES PROGRAM SERVICES

Direct Program Services	\$ 445,413	\$ 1,047,586
Educational Resources	172,312	N/A
Organizational Development Services	534,464	N/A
Communication	273,446	242,009
Initiative on Resources in Spanish	39,600	—
<i>Lutheran Woman Today</i>	287,611	268,383
Planned Giving	147,893	163,615
Other Program and Training Events	60,000	58,000
Grants and Scholarships	201,200	201,200
<b>Total Program Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 2,161,939</b>	<b>\$ 1,980,793</b>

### MANAGEMENT AND GENERAL

Governance	\$ 128,500	\$ 120,500
Administrative	749,687	624,516
<b>Total Administration</b>	<b>\$ 878,187</b>	<b>\$ 745,016</b>



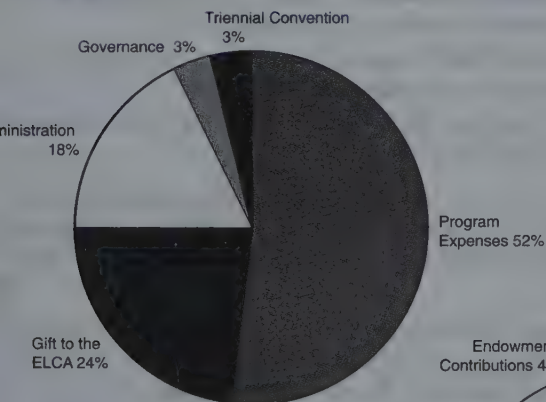
## REVENUE AND SUPPORT CONTINUED MANAGEMENT AND GENERAL

	2000 BUDGET	1999 BUDGET
Triennial Convention	125,000	1,731,178
Gift to the ELCA	1,000,000	1,000,000
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$ 4,165,126</b>	<b>\$ 5,456,987</b>

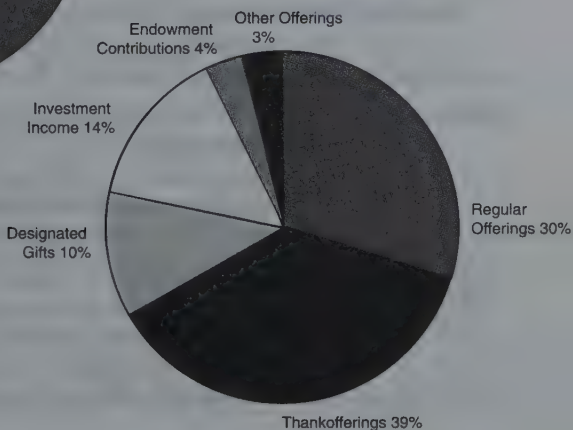
## OTHER TRANSACTIONS

Triennial Convention Reserves	\$ 100,000	—
Venture Funding	—	188,000
Other Fund Uses	457,617	(167,787)
<b>Total Other Transactions</b>	<b>\$ 557,617</b>	<b>\$ 20,213</b>
<b>Total Expenditures and Other Transactions</b>	<b>\$ 4,722,743</b>	<b>\$ 5,477,200</b>

## 2000 BUDGETED EXPENDITURES



## 2000 BUDGETED INCOME



# Praying our way through AD2K

Please join me and our other sisters across the church on a Lenten journey of prayer. Here's the plan.

**From Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday** (March 8 to April 23, 2000), agree with one or more other women (in congregations, in ecumenical groups, in virtual groups on the Internet) to take this journey together. Agree to pray and reflect on Scripture at the same time each day, wherever you happen to be. If possible, come together face to face at least once during Lent for group prayer and reflection.

## FIVE STEPS IN THE DAILY JOURNEY

- 1. Read the Scripture lessons for the days and weeks of Lent.** (For the daily texts, see page 45.)
- 2. Reflect on the lessons.** What is God saying to you? To our women's ministry organizations?
- 3. Respond to God's word in prayer.** Include the daily petitions suggested below.

**Sunday** We pray for ourselves. *Thank you, God, for another week to love and serve you!*

**Monday** We pray with and for our sisters in Christ all over the globe, especially Church Women United. *Lord, make us instruments of your peace in the world and of unity among Christians.*

**Tuesday** We pray for our women's organization. *Grant us, O God, vision, wisdom, and courage in discovering and acting on your purpose in Women of the ELCA.*

**Wednesday** We pray for women's ministry organizations in our home congregations and in special units. *Holy Spirit, give us eyes to see, hearts to feel, courage to lead, and the will to act on the opportunities for witness and service that are all around us, wherever you have placed us.*

**Thursday** We pray for the places where women's ministries come together: our synodical women's organizations. *Grant us, O God, the increased vision, wisdom, and courage that emerge when your daughters from many places act in unity of faith and purpose.*

(continued on page 46)

Lutheran Woman Today

# DAILY READINGS FOR LENT AD2K

## MARCH 2000

<b>8 Ash Wednesday</b> Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 <i>(Gospel readings are shaded)</i>
9 Daniel 9:1-14
10 Daniel 9:15-25a
11 Psalm 32
<b>12 1st Sunday in Lent</b> Mark 1:9-15
13 Job 4:1-21
14 Job 5:8-27
15 Matthew 4:1-11
16 Proverbs 30:1-9
17 1 Peter 3:8-18a
18 Psalm 77
<b>19 2nd Sunday in Lent</b> Mark 8:31-38
20 Genesis 21:1-7
21 Genesis 22:1-19
22 Mark 10:32-34
23 Jeremiah 30:12-22
24 Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-19
<b>25 The Annunciation of Our Lord</b> Luke 1:26-38
<b>26 3rd Sunday in Lent</b> John 2:13-22
27 1 Kings 6:1-14, 21-22
28 2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19
29 Mark 11:15-19
30 Ezra 6:1-16
31 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

## APRIL 2000

1 Psalm 84
<b>2 4th Sunday in Lent</b> John 3:14-21
3 Exodus 15:22-27
4 Numbers 20:1-13
5 John 8:12-20
6 Isaiah 60:15-22
7 Hebrews 3:1-6
8 Psalm 107:1-16
<b>9 5th Sunday in Lent</b> John 12:20-33
10 Isaiah 43:8-13
11 Isaiah 44:1-8
12 John 12:34-50
13 Haggai 2:1-9, 20-23
14 2 Corinthians 3:4-11
15 Psalm 119:9-16
<b>16 Sunday of the Passion/ Palm Sunday</b> Mark 14:1—15:47 or Mark 15:1-39 [40-47]
<b>17 Monday in Holy Week</b> Psalm 10
<b>18 Tuesday in Holy Week</b> Psalm 44
<b>19 Wednesday in Holy Week</b> Psalm 137
<b>20 Maundy Thursday</b> John 13:1-17, 31b-35
<b>21 Good Friday</b> John 18:1—19:42
<b>22 Holy Saturday</b> Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24
<b>23 The Resurrection of Our Lord</b> John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8

This list is adapted from Gail Ramshaw's book *Between Sundays* (Augsburg Fortress, 1997).



(continued from page 44)

**Friday** We pray for our own ministries in daily life. *Thank you, God, for calling us to service in your name, be it at home, in the community, in the workplace, at school, as volunteers, or at play. Show us how to support each other in these callings, for Jesus' sake.*

**Saturday** We pray for the church homeless—especially those who have not yet heard that Jesus loves them. *May our women's organizations be places where women discover the saving grace and mercy of God, the sisterhood of Christian women, and the sustaining Holy Spirit.*

**4. Record your thoughts and prayers** in a notebook or journal. Share them as appropriate with your prayer group and with women in your unit, as you ask where God is leading you together in women's ministry.

**5. Remind yourself of your Lenten Journey into AD2K.** Make and carry a set of prayer beads (or buttons) on your key ring as a reminder of the daily prayer petitions in this Lenten journey.

Make a prayer key ring with seven beads or buttons, one each of the following colors: **Red** for Sunday (self); **Orange** for Monday (global women); **Yellow** for Tuesday (Churchwide Women of the ELCA); **Green** for Wednesday (congregational women's organization); **Blue** for Thursday (synodical women's organization); **Purple** for Friday (ministry in daily life); and **Black** for Saturday (for the church homeless). You may want to make extras to give to your prayer partners.

**Send to:**  
**Lenten**  
**Journey into**  
**AD2K**  
**c/o Cathi**  
**Braasch**

**Women of the**  
**ELCA**  
**8765 W.**  
**Higgins Rd.,**  
**Chicago IL**  
**60631**

### **WHERE WILL THE JOURNEY TAKE YOU?**

What would a journey be without postcards? Please drop me a note, a postcard, or an email message and tell me about your Lenten Journey into AD2K. No need to wait until the end of the journey—write any time. Even if I can't respond to each message, I'll be reading them, posting them at the office, and writing about what I hear from those joining their sisters in Christ on this journey. **LWT**

email:  
**LENTAD2K@**  
**elca.org**

*Catherine I. H. Braasch, Executive Director*  
*Women of the ELCA*

# Underlines

## WAYS TO USE LWT

### Epiphany, Season of Light January/February 2000

The Epiphany light has been shed on us, and its beams continue to warm and cheer us" (*LBW* 76) on your walk of faith. The January/February issue gives us several ways to share this Epiphany light.

Did you think of a recently widowed friend as you read Jean S. Platt's "Prayer for Margaret" (p. 6)? Who in your circle of friends and acquaintances needs your presence, your warm embrace?

Perhaps you know of someone who has suffered a miscarriage. In "What to say?" (p. 60), Kristen Schlauderaff gives guidance for being a true friend to those bearing this pain. Consider giving your friend the recommended book *Our Stories of Miscarriage: Healing with Words*.

### Wrestling with God March 2000

The March issue encourages us to put our whole selves into our relationship with God.

Use Walter Brueggemann's article on the Psalms and wrestling (p. 5) in your devotions. Take time to read the Bible passages he cites. Have you ever wrestled with God? Have



you ever been fearful about bringing to God your anger or your deepest anxieties? Brueggemann urges us to ponder these questions and act on God's promises.

And what about dreams? Did Herbert Chilstrom's "I never dreamed ..." (p. 8) remind you of a powerful dream that you need to pay more attention to?

Glennady Sculley's "Who, me? Ordained?" (p. 31) may have planted a seed in you as you consider your vocation. Or clip and send to someone who is considering becoming a pastor.

Finally, Kirsi Stjerna's column (p. 36) gives comfort to those who have wrestled with feelings of guilt in their relationships with the children in their lives. Share this article with others. Post the prayer of confession (p. 37) where you can read it daily. Receive strength so you may continue to be a bearer of God's Epiphany light!

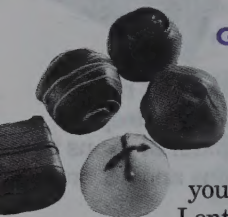
*Barbara Hofmaier*

*Our thanks to Barbara for her work as "Underlines" columnist and IdeaNet editor. Blessings, Barbara, on your new work with Women's Opportunity Fund!—Ed.*



## DEVOTIONAL PRAYERS FOR TODAY

Kathleen Kastilahn



### GIVING UP

Chocolate. Gossip. Movies. Maybe you've written one of these on lists

you've made before Lent in years past. I

have. Partly we do it to be aware, every day, that the day mirrors for Christians one of the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert wilderness being tempted by Satan. Partly we do it, I suspect, as a spring cleaning of our bad habits, a kind of personal self-improvement project.

That second aspect came clear to me when I first read *The Irrational Season*, Madeleine L'Engle's personal journal written in the framework of the liturgical year (Harper San Francisco, 1979). She, too, used to make lists of small things to give up. "But then it occurred to me," she writes, "that if what I was giving up was something bad, it should be given up once and for all."

*God of all our days, be with us as we each examine ourselves at the beginning of this new Lenten season and give us insight.*

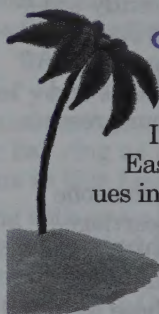


### TAKING ON

Injustice. Greed. Apathy. Maybe these will surface in you, in me, as we live and pray during these 40 Lenten days. A more

troubling list, certainly, than chocolate, gossip, and movies. And then what will we do? I turn back to Madeleine L'Engle: "But now I feel that I want to do something positive, rather than something negative, for these wintry weeks." Me, too. What is uncovered, we can see. What we can see, we can begin to "do something positive" about.

*God of our hope, keep us focused and give us strength to do what you would have us do.*



### GOING AWAY

"I am too eager for spring. In my heart I am too eager for Easter," L'Engle continues in her Lenten confession. And I

know that feeling, too. Television ads

and travel brochures

tempt us to escape the wearying days of late winter. But what can we learn about ourselves, our faith, and God's will for our lives if we instead look upon these restless days as a time to be still, to listen, to wait?

*Give us patience, Lord, so that we may attend to the ordinary needs of each other and of your world.* **LWT**

Kathleen Kastilahn is editor of the "People & Faith" section of The Lutheran.



# BULLETIN BOARD

## LWT SUBSCRIPTION CENTER

*For change of address, subscription orders, subscription inquiries*

**800-426-0115, ext. 639**

## Augsburg Fortress, Publishers

Box 1816

Danbury, CT 06813-1816

[subscriptions@augsbουργfortress.org](mailto:subscriptions@augsbουργfortress.org)

## LWT EDITORIAL OFFICE

### Women of the ELCA

8765 W. Higgins Road

Chicago, IL 60631-4189

[lwt@elca.org](mailto:lwt@elca.org)

[www.elca.org/wo/lwt/](http://www.elca.org/wo/lwt/)

## WOMEN OF THE ELCA

8765 W. Higgins Road

Chicago, IL 60631-4189

[womnelca@elca.org](mailto:womnelca@elca.org)

[www.elca.org/wo/](http://www.elca.org/wo/)

## Bible study resource orders

*Leader Guides, Resource Books, Companion Bibles ...*

**800-328-4648**

## Permission to reprint articles

**800-421-0239**

## ELCA Braille and Tape Ministry

**800-426-0115, ext. 502**

## LWT promotion items

**800-426-0115, ext. 438**

## Women of the ELCA

**800-638-3522, ext. 2730**

## Bible study information and comments

**800-638-3522, ext. 2737**

## LWT editorial information and comments

**800-638-3522, ext. 2743**

# SUBSCRIPTION FORM

*Group subscriptions may be available through your congregation.)*

Send to: **Lutheran Woman Today Circulation**

**Augsburg Fortress, Box 1816, Danbury, CT 06813-1816**

Or call 800-426-0115, ext. 639

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed: ☐ regular print \$11.50 ☐ big print \$11.50

Add \$6 for addresses outside North America. South Dakota and Washington state residents, please add sales tax.

☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard ☐ American Express ☐ Discover

Credit card # \_\_\_\_\_ Credit card exp. date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

*Prices and frequency subject to change without notice.*

*(All credit card orders must be signed.)*

March 2000

M030003



#BXBLBV \*\*\*\*\*3-DIGIT 947

|||||||

#008116291#0003 LMT03MR 2A 27

GRADUATE THEOL UNION

LIBRARY-SERIALS DEPT

2400 RIDGE RD

BERKELEY CA 94709-1212

025  
200